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SENSITIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C, DRL AND PRM/AFR  
KAMPALA FOR REFCOORD  
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [UNHCR](#) [RW](#) [BY](#)  
SUBJECT: RWANDANS IN BURUNDI: ASYLUM SEEKERS BEGIN RETURNING

REF: A. STATE 14934  
[1](#)B. KIGALI 73

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASS, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Rwandans in Burundi

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[1](#)1. (U) In an 8 May meeting with poloff, UNHCR External Relations Officer Beatriz Garcia reported that the flow of Rwandans departing for Burundi has stopped and that there are unconfirmed reports that several hundred Rwandans have left northern Burundi and returned to southern Rwanda. UNHCR has one returnee monitoring officer in southern Rwanda who will continue to investigate and report on the developing situation. RwandaTV recently showed scenes of GOR officials ceremoniously greeting and welcoming Rwandans returning across the border.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In a 22 April meeting with poloff in Bujumbura, UNHCR representative France Lau reported a total of 19,570 Rwandan asylum seekers in northern Burundi. Of that number, under five percent had received refugee status and the remainder were designated as "illegal immigrants" by both the GOR and GOB. All individuals denied refugee status are eligible to appeal the decision; however, Lau said the appeal process would be slow as there are only two legal aides assisting the denied applicants. She opined that very few would succeed in their appeal. Lau reported no overt pressure from either government to forcibly return the asylum seekers. (Note. In mid-June 2005, approximately 5,000 Rwandan asylum seekers were involuntarily returned to Rwanda by GOR police and military units. The operation was supported by GOB security forces. End note).

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to Lau, the primary reason for granting refugee was the demonstration of a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to Rwanda. The primarily Hutu asylum seekers generally did not use gacaca as a reason for fleeing Rwanda, but tended to use a more general "atmosphere of fear" rationale. The recent drought in south Rwanda and subsequent food insecurity was also considered a factor. Lau said she was not aware of any recruitment of Rwandans by Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in the Burundian camps.

Burundians in Rwanda

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[1](#)4. (U) Separately, Garcia reported that the Nyamure Refugee Camp, in the former Butare Province, has been closed in order to consolidate UNHCR operations. Approximately 1,500 Burundian asylum seekers were transferred to the Kigeme Refugee Camp in the former Gikongoro Province. The estimated 2,500 refugees in Kigeme have been encouraged by UNHCR to

return to Burundi and are transported back if they decide to return. (Note. UNHCR expects to be able to voluntarily repatriate approximately 2,000 of the refugees in 2006. End note).

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